

Investigative journalism in U.S. history

Educator Instructions

Summary

In the ["Democracy's Watchdog" lesson](#), students learn how investigative journalism has changed the course of U.S. history. Before the lesson host, Wesley Lowery of The Washington Post, guides students through five significant cases, they have an opportunity to explore a timeline of 22 notable investigative journalism cases (element 3 of the lesson.)

For this activity, small groups of students will focus on one of these 22 cases and present details to the class, using a collaborative poster and a gallery walk. Then they will speculate on how things might be different today if these reports had not been published.

Preparation

If you are using this activity in conjunction with the "Democracy's Watchdog" lesson, we recommend doing it either immediately after watching the first two lesson videos or after completing the lesson in its totality.

If you choose to use this activity after completing the lesson, we suggest that you remove the five cases featured in the lesson — **"Ten Days in a Mad-House"** (Nellie Bly), **"Southern Horrors"** (Ida B. Wells), **"My Lai Massacre"** (Seymour Hersh), **"Product of Mexico"** (Richard Marosi and Don Bartletti) and **"Fatal Force"** (The Washington Post) from the list of options so that students will be encouraged to select new cases.

Materials needed

- One poster-size board or piece of paper for each investigative journalism case.
- Markers and pens.
- Sticky notes.
- Optional: Printed summaries of each of the 22 cases. The **Resources** section of Checkology includes a PDF of these summaries, or you can [click here](#).

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Activity

1. Present the cases to your students. You can use a projector to display the timeline (element 3 of “**Democracy’s Watchdog**”) or provide students with printouts of the timeline. (If you wish, you can also select your own cases.) Students then decide which case they want to learn more about and divide into small groups based on their interest in each case.
2. Students work together to research the case and organize their findings on a poster. Suggested prompts for research and discussion:
 - How did the reporter(s) learn about the issue?
 - How did the reporter(s) bring the issue to light for the public?
 - What were the consequences of their reporting? Did any policies change, or did any social norms or trends shift?
3. After the student groups complete their posters, do a gallery walk to the other posters. Encourage them to think critically about the information they see and to make connections between cases, and invite them to leave comments or questions, using sticky notes, on other groups’ posters. Students then return to their original posters and take time to read the comments and questions they received, researching answers if necessary.
4. Each group has a few minutes to present their main findings, as well as to answer questions and address comments.
5. **Optional reflection:** Ask each student to select one case (not their own) from the posters in the room. Using the poster and research skills, write on the following: How might things be different today if this had not been published?